

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marcia Ann Gillespie

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Gillespie, Marcia
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie,
Dates:	July 14, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:07:24).
Abstract:	Magazine editor Marcia Ann Gillespie (1944 -) the first African American woman to achieve that position at a mainstream publication in the United States, served as editor-in-chief at Essence and Ms. Magazines. Gillespie was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 14, 2013, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_205
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Magazine editor Marcia Ann Gillespie was born on July 10, 1944 in Rockville Centre, New York. Her father, Charles M. Gillespie, was a church sexton and ran a floor waxing business; her mother, Ethel Young Gillespie, a domestic worker who operated a catering business on the side. Gillespie and her sister, Charlene Gillespie, grew up- in Long Island, New York. She graduated from a mostly white and Jewish high school and then enrolled in Lake Forest College where she graduated with honors with her B.A. degree in American studies in 1966.

Upon graduation, Gillespie worked as a researcher at Time-Life Books, Inc. in New York City. She was hired as a managing editor at the newly-founded African American publication *Essence* Magazine in 1970 and was promoted to editor-in-chief in 1971. While there, she transformed *Essence* Magazine into one of the fastest growing women's publications in the United States. Gillespie joined *Ms.* Magazine in 1980 and served in several capacities, including as a contributing writer, contributing editor, and executive editor. In 1992, she was named editor-in-chief of *Ms.* Magazine, making her the first African American woman to achieve that position at a mainstream publication in the United States. She went on to serve as president of Liberty Media for Women in 1996 after the company purchased *Ms.* Magazine from the McDonald Communications Corporation. Gillespie also served as a guest lecturer and advisor to the vice chancellor of the University of the West Indies.

Gillespie served on the board of directors of the Rod Rodgers Dance Company, the Arthur Ashe Institute of Urban Health, the Black & Jewish Women of New York, the Violence Policy Center in Washington, D.C. She also was appointed to the advisory board of the Aspen Institute, the New Federal Theater in New York City, and the Studio Museum of Harlem. Gillespie is a member of the National Council of Negro Women and the American Association of Magazine Editors.

In 1973 received the Lake Forest College Outstanding Alumni Award; and, in 1978, she received the New York Women in Communications Matrix Award in 1978. The New York Association of Black Journalists honored Gillespie with its Life Achievement Award for Print Journalism. In 1982, Gillespie was named as one of the "Top Ten Outstanding Women in Magazine Publishing" by the March of Dimes.

Marcia Ann Gillespie was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 14, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 14, 2013, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Magazine editor Marcia Ann Gillespie (1944 -) the first African American woman to achieve that position at a mainstream publication in the United States, served as editor-in-chief at *Essence* and *Ms.* Magazines.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Gillespie, Marcia

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gillespie, Marcia--Interviews

African American editors--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Magazine Editor

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie, July 14, 2013. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The

HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie, Section A2013_205_001_001, TRT: 1:09:36 2013/07/14

Marcia Ann Gillespie narrates her photographs.

Photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie, Section A2013_205_001_002, TRT: 2:28:54 2013/07/14

Marcia Ann Gillespie was born in 1944 in Rockville Centre, New York to Ethel Young Gillespie and Charles Gillespie, nine years after her sister, Charlene Gillespie. Gillespie traces her maternal family history to her great-grandmother, Lividia Risen, who was born a slave and had seventeen children, Gillespie's grandmother being the youngest. Risen brought the family to Long Branch, New Jersey. Gillespie's grandmother, Rosa Young, later moved to Rockville Centre where she married Charles Young and raised four children, Gillespie's mother being the youngest. Gillespie then describes her paternal family history. Her great-grandparents farmed in North Carolina. Gillespie's father grew up in Johns Station, North Carolina, but he moved north and settled in Rockville Centre in 1930. Gillespie describes her parents' life together, who she takes after, and her impressions of growing up in the segregated Rockville Centre community.

African American families.

Rural-urban migration--United States.

African American parents--New York (State).

Childhood and youth--New York (State).

Segregation.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie, Section
A2013_205_001_003, TRT: 3:29:17 2013/07/14

Marcia Ann Gillespie describes the segregated elementary school system in Rockville Centre, New York, in the 1940s. Gillespie's parents became civically involved and helped organize a boycott to desegregate her school when they discovered that the black children were being groomed for domestic service. Gillespie then shares early memories of life in the black community of Rockville Centre, New York in the 1940s and early 1950s. While she describes her neighborhood as having some violence, she always felt protected by her parents. Gillespie describes her religious upbringing at Shiloh Baptist Church, and talks about her ambivalence towards the hypocrisy she experienced in church. Gillespie then describes her time at Clinton elementary school, her transfer to the newly desegregated Floyd B. Watson Elementary School, and her interests, friends, and teachers there.

Segregation in education--New York (State).

Community activists.

African American neighborhoods--New York (State)--
Rockville Centre.

African American churches--New York (State)--Rockville
Centre.

African Americans--Education, Elementary--New York
(State)--Rockville Centre.

Childhood and youth--New York (State)--Rockville
Centre.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie, Section
A2013_205_001_004, TRT: 4:29:59 2013/07/14

Marcia Ann Gillespie describes being an avid reader as a child, her involvement with the youth chapter of the NAACP during high school, and her parent's involvement

with the Civil Rights Movement. Gillespie then recalls Bayard Rustin visiting her house, which was later followed by a visit from the FBI, who questioned her parents. She describes boycotting Woolworths, being involved with the youth March on Washington in 1959, and watching the March on Washington in 1963 on television. Gillespie then describes her experiences in high school at Southside Senior High School in Rockville Centre, New York, and the type of student she was. Gillespie recalls the lack of counseling she received for college, how she was able to find funding through the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, and her attendance of Lake Forest College in Lake Forest, Illinois in 1962.

Childhood and youth--Activities--New York (State)--Rockville Centre.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Civil rights movements.

United States. Federal Bureau of Investigation.

March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Washington, D.C., 1963.

African Americans--Education, Secondary--New York (State)--Rockville Centre.

Lake Forest College.

Rustin, Bayard, 1912-1987.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie, Section A2013_205_001_005, TRT: 5:29:56 2013/07/14

Marcia Ann Gillespie describes attending Lake Forest College in Illinois from 1962 to 1966, and reflects on the influential teachers and people she met while studying American Studies, including professors Nathan I. Huggins and John Sproat. Gillespie describes her interest in black history, her involvement in campus civil rights issues, trying to recruit more African American students, and a tutoring program with the Robert Taylor Homes Housing Project in Chicago that she was involved with. She explains that her interest in American Studies intersected with her interest in black history and the contemporary

Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s. Gillespie graduated from Lake Forest College in 1966 with a degree in American Studies and planned to save money to attend graduate school.

Huggins, Nathan Irvin, 1927-1989.

Lake Forest College.

Sproat, John G.

Civil rights movements.

Studies in African American history and culture.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie, Section A2013_205_001_006, TRT: 6:29:16 2013/07/14

Marcia Ann Gillespie describes her career at Time, Inc. from 1966 to 1970, including the culture of the company and what it was like being a young African American female editor. Gillespie describes her experience working on a series about new leaders for the black community, and how difficult it was to get recognition at Time, Inc. She recalls several experiences where she was at odds with the editors and developed a reputation for being “radical”. Gillespie left Time, Inc. in 1970, when she was hired as an editor for Essence Magazine by the co-founder, Gordon Parks. Gillespie describes how she quickly realized her talent at managing editing, but she found herself at odds with the managing editor, Ida Lewis. In 1971, Gillespie rose to the level of the editor-in-chief at Essence Magazine.

Time, inc.

African American leadership--United States.

Career development.

African American publishers.

Lewis, Ida, 1842-1911.

Parks, Gordon, 1912-2006.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie, Section A2013_205_001_007, TRT: 7:30:26 2013/07/14

Marcia Ann Gillespie describes her experience as editor-in-chief of Essence Magazine from 1971 to 1980. She shared her vision of making Essence a magazine for black women in what she called the “striver group,” with a focus

on “inspiration, information, and affirmation.” Gillespie recalls conversations with the founders about targeting the magazine to a female audience, and making that a priority. Gillespie also recalls some of her favorite issues and covers, noting with fondness the stories on black love and relationships, and the poetry and fiction that the magazine published. Gillespie describes the importance of the beauty section of the magazine how she highlighted the message that black women are beautiful. She also shares some of the challenges she faced as editor-in-chief, recalling the tension of landing advertisers, reaching a larger readership, and staying true to her vision and values.

African American women--Marketing.

Beauty, Personal

Management.

African American publishers.